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Reaching and Serving

TEEN VICTIMS

A PRACTICAL
HANDBOOK



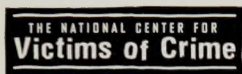
National Crime
Prevention Council

THE NATIONAL CENTER FOR
Victims of Crime



The National Crime Prevention Council (NCPC) is a private, nonprofit tax-exempt [501(c)(3)] organization whose primary mission is to enable people to create safer and more caring communities by addressing the causes of crime and violence and reducing the opportunities for crime to occur. NCPC publishes books, kits of camera-ready program materials, posters, and informational and policy reports on a variety of crime prevention and community-building subjects. NCPC offers training, technical assistance, and a national focus for crime prevention: it acts as secretariat for the Crime Prevention Coalition of America, a nonpartisan group of more than 360 national, federal, state, and local organizations committed to preventing crime. It hosts a number of websites that offer prevention tips to individuals, describe prevention practices for community building, and help anchor prevention policy into laws and budgets. It operates demonstration programs in schools, neighborhoods, and entire jurisdictions and takes a major leadership role in youth crime prevention and youth service; it also administers the Center for Faith and Service. NCPC manages the McGruff® "Take A Bite Out Of Crime®" public service advertising campaign.

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The National Center for Victims of Crime is the nation's leading resource and advocacy organization dedicated to serving individuals, families, and communities harmed by crime. Our mission is to forge a national commitment to help victims of crime rebuild their lives. Working with local, state, and federal partners, the National Center provides direct services and resources to victims of crime across the country; advocates for laws and public policies that secure rights, resources, and protections for crime victims; delivers training and technical assistance to victim service organizations, counselors, attorneys, criminal justice agencies, and allied professionals serving victims of crime; and fosters cutting-edge thinking about the impact of crime and the ways in which each of us can help victims of crime rebuild their lives.



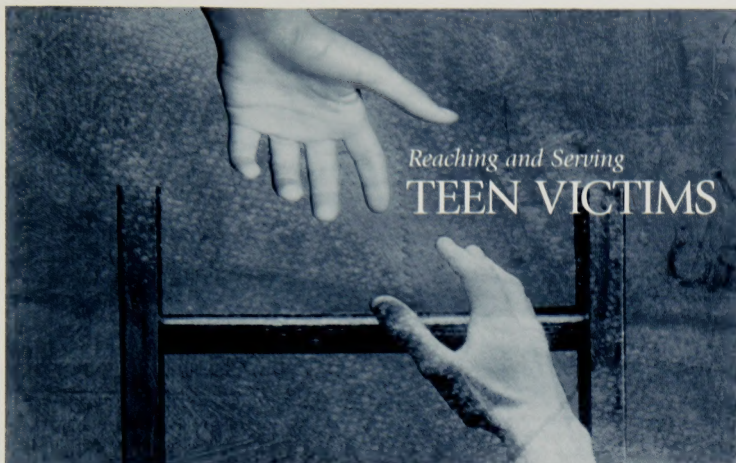
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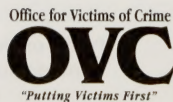
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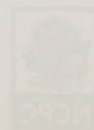
Reaching and Serving
TEEN VICTIMS

**A PRACTICAL
HANDBOOK**

*National Crime Prevention Council
National Center for Victims of Crime
Office for Victims of Crime*



Points of view in this document are those of the authors
and do not necessarily represent the official position
of the U.S. Department of Justice.



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Why a Guide on Teen Victims?

In October 2003, the Office for Victims of Crime (OVC) funded the National Crime Prevention Council (NCPC) to develop a public awareness initiative focusing on educating youth on the dynamics of victimization and resources for help and support. Together with the National Center for Victims of Crime (National Center), NCPC competitively selected 20 school- and community-based organizations throughout the country to participate in the Youth Outreach for Victim Assistance (YOVA) project and develop youth-led victimization awareness campaigns. Among other activities, the 20 sites conducted 25 workshops and assemblies, designed 12 posters, wrote 11 informational brochures, recorded 15 radio and five video public service announcements, and developed three websites. They reached an estimated 1.1 million individuals with information on a variety of teen victimization issues. To further the goals of the YOVA project, this handbook was developed as a tool to assist victim service providers in their efforts to better understand the special needs of adolescent victims as well as methods for effective outreach, assessment, and intervention.

THE UNIQUE BARRIERS FACING TEEN VICTIMS

Mention “teens” and “crime,” and many people think about vandalism, stolen cars, and gang violence. Crime committed by teens is without doubt an urgent problem. However, an obsession with young criminals obscures another troubling problem—the alarming number of American adolescents who are victims of crime. At home, at school, and in public places, teenagers are victimized by assault, rape, robbery, and other crimes. Indeed, they are twice as likely as adults to become victims of violent crime. The rate of violent victimization in 2002 was higher for persons ages 16 to 19 years (58.2 per 1,000) and 12 to 15 years (44.4 per 1,000) than for any other age group.¹ Furthermore, these victims are highly vulnerable to being revictimized; one study found that 80 percent of youths reporting violent victimization had been victimized two or more times.²

Despite being victimized more often than other age groups, teens are the least likely to report their victimization. In 2002 just 37.8 percent of personal crimes (includes all violent crimes plus pickpocketing and purse snatching) with victims ages 12 to 19 were reported to police, while the reporting rates for other age groups ranged from 50.8 to 58.1 percent.³

Why don't teens report their victimization? The shock, shame, and stigma attached to being a victim of crime often make it difficult even for adults to report their victimization. Teens face many additional obstacles:

- Lack of understanding that what they experienced was a crime
- Fear that no one will believe them
- Fear of being blamed or punished
- Feelings of guilt, shame, and self-blame
- Fear of retaliation
- Mistrust of adults
- Belief that nothing will be done
- Lack of knowledge about available services
- Lack of access to services
- Perceived and real limits of confidentiality

These obstacles represent a formidable barrier to vulnerable teens seeking help, even when outreach and referral programs are

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in place. Furthermore, legal issues involved in working with minors, such as parental consent and mandatory reporting, make some victim service providers reluctant to reach out to them. As a result of these factors, needed services are not reaching many teen victims.

This has serious consequences. Several studies have documented the correlation between victimization and negative outcomes during adolescence or later in life. Teens who have been victimized are more likely to be truant and have more negative contacts with teachers, and there is some evidence that this disruption to their education translates into lower earnings later in life. Adolescent victims also have higher rates of teen pregnancy, substance abuse, depression, eating disorders, and delinquency.^{4,5} Some of these problems may be preventable if teen victims receive the help and support they need in the immediate aftermath of their victimization.

Who Will Benefit From This Handbook?

The purpose of this document is to help victim service providers more effectively reach and work with teen victims. By victim service providers, we mean prosecutor- or police-based victim advocates; employees and volunteers at community-based organizations such as rape crisis centers and domestic violence shelters; and health and mental health professionals whose work includes a focus on trauma and victimization. Some victim service providers may already be actively involved in serving teen victims, and for them this handbook may prove to be a refresher and a source of a few ideas they haven't tried yet. Other victim service providers may be just beginning to work with teens and will find most of the material in this handbook to be new information that will be helpful for starting or expanding services to teens through their agency.

Although this guide is written with victim service providers in mind, there are others who

would benefit from reading it. Those who work with youth in an educational or recreational capacity will find in this document the information they need to recognize the effects of victimization in some of these teens and ideas for collaborating with others in their community who work directly with victims. We recommend that anyone who works with youth become familiar with local victim service providers and refer teens and parents to these resources when he or she becomes aware that a teen has been victimized or suspects that there has been abuse.

Organization of This Handbook

Reaching and Serving Teen Victims covers the following areas:

- Chapters 1 and 2 present the rationale for focusing on teen victims and explore the common ground between victim services and youth development.
- Chapters 3 and 4 cover the principles of adolescent development and the unique impact of victimization on adolescents, who are already facing numerous challenges as they transition from childhood to adulthood.
- Chapter 5 presents tips on how to assess the nature and extent of teen victimization in your own community.
- Chapters 6 through 8 discuss specific steps (from outreach to the service environment to specific interventions) that service providers can take to improve their success with teen victims.
- Chapter 9 gives tips on legal issues and parental involvement.
- Chapter 10 provides closing comments.
- A final section highlights resources for more information.

This handbook is part of an effort by the National Center for Victims of Crime and the

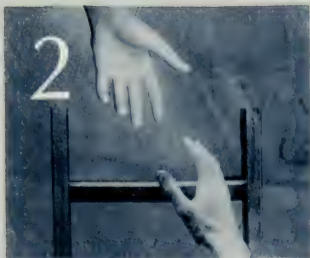
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National Crime Prevention Council to overcome the barriers to reporting crimes and get teen victims the help they need. Through the Youth Outreach for Victim Assistance (YOVA) project, groups of youth leaders around the country are creating educational awareness campaigns for teens on victimization. With this guide, we appeal to victim service providers—who understand so well the needs of all crime victims—to rise to the challenge of reaching out to teen victims and providing assistance that meets their unique needs.



NOTES

1. Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS), *Criminal Victimization in the United States, 2002: Statistical Tables* (Washington, DC: BJS, U.S. Department of Justice, 2003), table 3.
2. Madeline Wordes and Michell Nunez, *Our Vulnerable Teenagers: Their Victimization, Its Consequences, and Directions for Prevention and Intervention* (Washington, DC: National Council on Crime and Delinquency and National Center for Victims of Crime, 2002), 11.
3. BJS, *Criminal Victimization*, table 96.
4. Wordes and Nunez, *Our Vulnerable Teenagers*, 13.
5. Jay Silverman, Anita Raj, Lorelei Mucci, and Jeanne Hathaway, "Dating Violence Against Adolescent Girls and Associated Substance Use, Unhealthy Weight Control, Sexual Risk Behavior, Pregnancy, and Suicidality," *Journal of the American Medical Association* 286, no. 5 (2001): 572–579.



It's Not So Different After All

Both youth development professionals and victim service providers have many of the skills necessary to work with teens. Victims, like many teens, often feel isolated, powerless, disrespected, and misunderstood. Professionals who know how to help people see their own worth and power despite such feelings are well suited to work with teens, with victims, or with both.

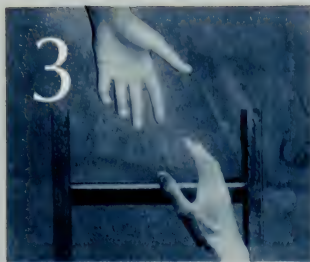
THOUGHTS ON YOUTH DEVELOPMENT AND VICTIM EMPOWERMENT

A core value of both fields, empowerment helps victims regain a sense of control and overcome the feelings of powerlessness that so often accompany victimization. For teens, having opportunities to exert power safely and prosocially greatly eases the transition into adulthood.

Because of their sensitivity to victims' needs and their respect for the choices victims make, victim service providers can be great allies for teenage victims. By keeping in mind the principles of victim empowerment and youth development, victim assistance professionals can play a pivotal role in providing appropriate assistance to teenage victims, thus helping them regain self-esteem, a sense of personal power, and faith in their abilities to build a brighter future for themselves.

In reality, of course, teenagers do not have the same power (or experience or knowledge) as adults, and it would be misleading to pretend otherwise. When teens are being abused, for example, adults have a duty to report, and legally teens don't have a choice in the matter (more on this issue in Chapter 9). In situations where teens take on traditionally adult roles, such as board members or full partners in project planning and implementation, it is the responsibility of the adults involved to ensure that the teens are provided with adequate training and support to be successful in these roles. Leadership behavior is not automatic when youth are placed in leadership roles. That said, it is sadly much more common for teens never to be given the opportunity to exercise leadership than for them to be put in roles for which they are unprepared. Either situation is ultimately disempowering. The approach advocated in this handbook, for both teen and adult victims, is to respect the power of their potential contributions as advocates, decision makers, and partners, and to nurture those contributions and give them space to grow.

Partnership	Youth Development	Victim Services
Advocacy	<p><i>Youth are seen as resources to the community.</i></p> <p>Teens are not seen as troublemakers but rather as resources to their communities, capable of exercising leadership and taking action for positive change.</p>	<p><i>Victims are part of the solution.</i></p> <p>Victims are not blamed or seen as part of the problem but as part of the solution. Participation in community policing, prosecution, and activism is one of the common ways for victims to play a solution-oriented role.</p>
Decision Making	<p><i>Youth are given real decision-making power.</i></p> <p>They are given real (not symbolic) power by serving on boards, city councils, and leadership committees. They are accorded the same respect at the table as adults.</p>	<p><i>Victims regain control by making their own decisions.</i></p> <p>The power to make choices is fundamental for victims, who often feel that power has been stripped from them. Service providers respect the decisions victims make.</p>
Partnership	<p><i>Youth and adults work in partnership.</i></p> <p>Youth and adults are on equal footing, with each exercising leadership and contributing strengths to solutions that benefit the community as well as its individual members of all ages.</p>	<p><i>Victims work in partnership with police and providers.</i></p> <p>Victims are brought to the table as partners with those whose job it is to help them—primarily law enforcement and victim service providers.</p>



When asked to brainstorm a list of words they associate with teenagers, many adults come up with adjectives like “rebellious,” “loud,” “disrespectful,” and “melodramatic.” While all of these descriptions may fit a large number of teens, it’s easy to overlook the developmental processes that underlie these seemingly negative characteristics.

How Teens Are Different From Adults and Children

THE “SKINNY” ON ADOLESCENT DEVELOPMENT

Teens *are* often rebellious, but this is part of adolescent development. As they become more independent, they encounter resistance from parents, teachers, and other adults. They are loud because they are finding their voices and determining their identities. They may react disrespectfully when they sense that adults do not value them as individuals capable of thinking for themselves. The massive physical, cognitive, social, and emotional changes adolescents undergo in a short period of time are a recipe for melodrama.

Teens also display many positive characteristics related to their developmental stage. Adolescents’ passion, energy, creativity, and sense of discovery often make them a joy to work with. Without a doubt, the many changes teens experience present their adult allies with both challenges and rewards.

Physical Changes

Puberty: One of the most dramatic changes that happens during adolescence is puberty. Early adolescents (middle school age) usually react to the physical changes of puberty by comparing themselves to their friends and wondering whether they are normal.

Body image: By middle adolescence (high school age), most of the physical changes of puberty have already taken place, and teens begin to focus on their body image and how it helps or hinders their attractiveness to potential boyfriends and girlfriends.

Sexual identity: As their bodies undergo the physical changes of puberty, adolescents experience feelings of attraction for people of the opposite or the same sex. For some, awareness of sexual orientation begins at this time, though the process of fully identifying one’s sexual orientation and sexual identity can take years.

Cognitive Changes

Concrete thinking: Young children see things in black and white. They don’t have the ability to weigh options or analyze multiple layers of situations, and they often interpret language literally, fail-

Without a doubt, the many changes teens experience present their adult allies with both challenges and rewards.

ing to understand ironic humor and double meanings. Early adolescents may still be at this stage of cognitive development or may be just beginning to move beyond it to the stages described below.

Abstract thinking: Middle adolescents develop the ability to see shades of gray when considering problems. Their interpretation of language expands to include nuance and irony. They also progress in using metaphors, symbols, and abstract concepts such as those involved in philosophy, religion, and politics.¹

Critical thinking: This cognitive shift is marked by the change from “what” questions to “how” and “why” questions. Adolescents begin to be able to grapple with complex issues, analyzing the available information and drawing conclusions from it. They are able to evaluate alternatives and use logic in decision making.

Social Changes

Peer group involvement: Adults have many relationships outside the family—with coworkers and bosses, neighbors, and friends. Adolescents prepare for these adult relationships by pulling back—to a greater or lesser degree—from family and spending more time with friends. In early adolescent peer groups, young teens explore gender, as girls and boys tend to hang out together in groups. In middle adolescence, peer groups support the search for identity by establishing their own dress code, communication style, and code of conduct.

Communication: Adolescents’ increased vocabularies and mastery of communication tools, together with their expanded world of nonfamily relationships, lead them to spend a larger part of

every day communicating. Communication skills improve at this time.

Emotional Changes

Mood swings: The intense hormonal activity within the adolescent’s body, along with the seismic emotional and cognitive shifts that teens experience, can lead to sudden mood swings in even the most “mellow” of adolescents. It is not uncommon for an adolescent to go from euphoria to tears or vice versa in a few minutes.

Intimacy: Forming nonfamily relationships with peers of both sexes gives adolescents their first opportunity to decide how much information about themselves they will share with others. Adolescents experiment with intimacy both with friends and with romantic partners, forming close emotional bonds and experiencing vulnerability and trust in relationships. They also begin to explore sexual intimacy.

Adult Identity Development

Identity: The quest for identity begins in adolescence. Middle adolescents (high school age) begin to be both introspective and egocentric, focusing on who they are and what they are becoming. All information is filtered through a “me” lens: “What does this mean about who I am?”

Autonomy: As they move toward adulthood, adolescents develop their own belief systems. This often entails questioning their parents’ beliefs and testing out new values introduced by peers or adults outside the family. Adolescents also claim autonomy over their own thoughts and feelings. Previously they may have been open with parents about their hurts and disappointments; now they begin to assert a right to privacy and to manage their own inner worlds.

The picture changes when an adolescent becomes a victim.

Independence: For teens, becoming independent means making their own decisions. Teens establish independence in a variety of ways: by working part-time jobs to earn their own money, by learning to drive or to navigate public transportation on their own, by making choices about everything from what clothes to wear to which school electives to take. Such freedom is routine for adults but novel for most teens.

Achievement: Younger children are motivated to achieve by the desire to win the approval of parents, teachers, and others. Adolescents begin to take satisfaction in achievement for its own sake, and they demonstrate a growing desire to succeed in the efforts they undertake.

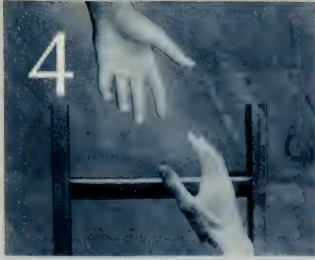
Risk: The passage to adulthood involves learning to assess risk, predict outcomes, and take reasonable chances; therefore, some risk-taking is normal for adolescents. Some of the risks teens take are likely to be applauded, such as trying out for plays or sports teams or asking someone out.

Other—unfortunately not uncommon—risk behaviors, such as driving too fast or experimenting with cigarettes or alcohol, are physically dangerous as well as illegal. To meet teens' developmental need to learn to handle risk, many youth programs provide positive risk-taking experiences, such as ropes courses or adventure trips.

A graphic representation of the typical adolescent growth curve would look something like the movements we hope for in the stock market: small ups and downs each day, with larger gains and losses on some days but an upward trend overall. However, the picture changes when an adolescent becomes a victim; then there are often more downs than ups, and sometimes the upward growth stops altogether.

NOTE

1. American Psychological Association (APA), *Developing Adolescents: A Reference for Professionals* (Washington, DC: APA, 2002), 11.



Brian is in eighth grade. He lives in the city and walks three blocks to his house after getting off the school bus each afternoon. Walking home one afternoon, he saw some older boys—not from his neighborhood—walking toward him. After he passed them, he felt somebody push him from behind, and he fell to his knees. He dropped his book bag and CD player and headphones. One of the boys told Brian to give him his CD player—Brian’s most prized possession. It was a birthday gift from his father, and he listened to it every day on the way to and from school. When he didn’t hand it over, the boys pushed him again. One of the boys pulled a gun out of his pocket and demanded the CD player and headphones. Brian cried as they ripped it out of his hands and ran off.

Talk About Being Knocked for a Loop

WHEN VICTIMIZATION COLLIDES WITH NORMAL TEENAGE UPS AND DOWNS

As a victim, Brian may experience any or all of the following reactions in the immediate aftermath of the crime:

- Shock
- Numbness
- Loss of control
- Disorientation
- Helplessness
- Sense of vulnerability
- Fear

Although all of these reactions are a normal response to an overwhelming incident such as the robbery Brian experienced, to many victims (and, sadly, to their families and friends as well), these reactions are a sign of weakness. Victims have a tendency to blame themselves for “allowing” the crime to happen. If adult victims see themselves as weak, imagine the feelings of an adolescent boy who naturally judges himself on how well he measures up to standards of manliness set by society and his peers!

Victimization can impact adolescents in each of the crucial areas of adolescent development.

Physical Development

Puberty: While all early adolescents undergoing the massive changes of puberty wonder whether they are normal, those who have been victimized often are convinced that they are *not* normal. Victimization intensifies their feelings of awkwardness and makes them feel even more removed from their peers.

Body image: When early adolescents are sexually abused or assaulted, it can be difficult for them to avoid associating the victimization with their own changing bodies. They may try to hide their bodies, believing that the changes of puberty brought on the victimization. They may also believe that if they were bigger, stronger, skinnier, etc., the crime would not have happened. Middle adolescents or those who are multiple or chronic victims of sexual assault may begin to believe that their bodies are “only good for one thing,” or they may become promiscuous in an effort to reclaim control over their own sexuality.

Victimized teens may isolate themselves, believing that no one understands what they are going through.

Sexual identity: When adolescents are sexually abused or assaulted by someone of the same sex, they often wonder if they were targeted because they were in some way perceived as gay or if the abuse will “make them gay.” While there is no evidence of a correlation between victimization and subsequent sexual orientation, these victims are more likely to question their sexual orientation. Victim service providers should be sympathetic to this questioning while clarifying for young victims that sexual aggression is not connected to sexual orientation, for victims or for offenders. In fact, most people who commit same-sex sexual assault actually identify themselves as heterosexual.

Cognitive Development

Concrete thinking: When youth become victims during early adolescence before they have developed abstract thinking skills, they are likely to believe that the current reality will be permanent. They lack the perspective of experience and the abstract and critical thinking skills that would enable them to imagine a different reality. An early adolescent victim may think that the painful feelings accompanying his or her victimization will last a lifetime or even that the victimization itself will never end.

Abstract and critical thinking: Older adolescents begin to ask “why” and “how” questions as they ponder meaning and cause and effect. But because teens often lack enough experience to provide valid answers to these questions, the answers they come up with often point back to themselves. The victimized teen in the critical thinking phase may wonder, “What did I do to deserve this?” “Why didn’t I prevent this from happening?” “What does this say about me as a person?”

Social Development

Peer group involvement: Victimization can lead to several different peer dynamics. Some peer groups offer support that adults cannot, and very strong bonds of friendship can often stand the test of traumatic experiences. On the other hand, victimized teens may isolate themselves, believing that no one understands what they are going through, or they may be “kicked out” of their group of friends because of victim-blaming, especially if the victim speaks out against a popular offender.

“The wrong crowd”: Teens connect with people who are like themselves. Many victimized teens identify with others who are experiencing similar feelings of anger, betrayal, or isolation, though these teens usually don’t articulate the source of those feelings to one another. Adults and other teens may see these groups as “the bad kids” because they are more likely to use and abuse substances, skip school, and get into trouble.

Withdrawal or aggression: Victimization can lead normally social teens to withdraw, or it can lead to aggressive behavior in normally placid kids. It is important to recognize a change from the teen’s normal pattern.

Emotional Development

Mood swings: Teens are already experiencing dramatic highs and lows. Add to that the emotional reactions to crime, such as anger, fear, confusion, guilt, and frustration, and a “moody” teen may develop a “dark cloud” of negative emotions. Such teens generally have trouble finding acceptance from adults and peers alike.

Emotional control: The adolescent struggle for autonomy, when combined with the stressful emotional states that accompany victimization,

*For an adolescent, victimization
may intensify negative feelings,
sometimes to the point of despair.*

may produce a troubling dilemma. Teens may believe that they should be able to handle their own feelings and reactions, but when they find that they can't control their emotions, they may be filled with fear, anxiety, and self-doubt. It never occurs to most teens to turn to victim service providers who have information to help them handle these normal reactions to criminal victimization. The teens don't understand that these reactions are normal, that feelings may change rapidly, and that things can get better.

The "Big Four": Four typical reactions to crime are particularly damaging for teens:

- **Isolation**—Feeling different from the peer group, the teen either drops this group of friends or finds that they have dropped him or her.
- **Helplessness**—The teen feels that nothing can be done to change the situation and that no one can or will help or that no one cares.
- **Hopelessness**—The teen loses hope that life will return to normal or that the future will be better.
- **Powerlessness**—The teen feels that he or she has no control and no personal power.

All victims may experience these feelings, but for a teenager, who may already be experiencing feelings like these as a normal part of adolescence, they can be especially destructive. For an adolescent, victimization may intensify these negative feelings, sometimes to the point of despair.

Adult Identity Development

Identity: An adolescent victim who is in the throes of developing an adult identity may incorporate weakness or vulnerability as major elements of that identity. Alternatively, the victim may decide

to be "tough" or "strong." This may be constructive (the former victim goes on to advocate for the weak and vulnerable) or destructive (the victim engages in bullying or abuse).

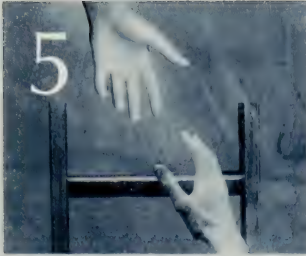
Autonomy: Some adolescent victims experience regression to earlier, childlike behaviors. Believing that they are not able to take care of themselves, they pull back from autonomy and become clingy with their parents or friends.

Risk-taking: All adolescents take some emotional and physical risks. Victimization—particularly repeat or chronic victimization—can turn normal risk-taking into recklessness. Victimized teens are more likely to abuse substances, engage in unprotected sex or sex with multiple partners, commit crimes, and attempt or complete suicide.¹

Working with teens is not a science, and it isn't always easy to distinguish between normal adolescent behavior and behavior that is the result of victimization. Victim service providers and others working with teens should keep in mind that victimization *may* be at the root of troubling behavior, but they should never assume that it is. A good rule of thumb is, "If in doubt, ask." Sometimes teens do not want to talk, but sometimes they are just waiting for the opportunity to open up. A simple "You don't seem yourself. Anything going on?" might be just the opening a teen was waiting for. If he or she doesn't want to talk right then, leaving the door open for a later conversation can be reassuring to a teen. Even if he or she never takes you up on it, just knowing that there is one adult willing to listen and care can help tremendously.

NOTE

1. Wordes and Nunez, *Our Vulnerable Teenagers*, 13.



National statistics on teen victimization are telling, but what does the problem look like in your community? The only way to know is to collect local information and talk with teens and service providers in your area. While some communities struggle with gang violence, others find that dating violence and sexual assault are major problems for their teens. In some towns, bullying has emerged as the biggest problem for teens and young adolescents. Although national organizations can be good resources, crime and victimization are essentially local problems that respond to locally driven solutions.

What's Happening in Your Neighborhood?

ASSESSING LOCAL PROBLEMS, RESOURCES, STRENGTHS, AND GAPS

Victim service organizations need to assess the local situation for teen victims. Such an assessment will help them ensure that their services meet existing community needs, but there are also other reasons to do it. Conducting a community assessment—even a simple one—is a great way to begin collaborations and partnerships that enable different sectors of the community to work together to better serve teen victims. Anyone who is involved in assessing a problem is more likely to be committed to working on the solution. Assessments can help with strategic planning and with securing funding to meet identified needs. Finally, a local needs assessment can give teen victims a wonderful opportunity to be heard and to contribute to making things better for other adolescent victims.

This chapter covers the basics of doing a community assessment, but we recognize that many agencies and organizations will not be starting from scratch. Some have already done assessments and may only need to tailor their ongoing data collection to include a focus on teens. Others may not have the time or resources to do a full assessment but could easily use just one or two of the tools mentioned below to get some information about teen victims that will help them tailor their services accordingly. However you use the information in this chapter, its basic message is that understanding a problem (through data) greatly increases your chances of effectively addressing it.

Getting Started

An assessment is essentially a research process—but don't let the word "research" intimidate you! It should begin with a goal or goals and research questions. The goals are what you aim to achieve and should answer the questions: "Why are we doing this?" and "What do we hope to accomplish?" Your initial goal can be as simple as "We want to know what kinds of victimization teens commonly face in our community and where they go for help."

Next, develop a set of broad research questions based on the types of information you are looking for and the ways in which the

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information will be used. For example, you may ask: "How many violent incidents have there been in the high school in the past two years?" "What do teens say is the biggest problem?" "What proportion of clients at agency X are adolescents?" If well framed, your research questions will suggest the best method to use to get the desired information (e.g., an interview with the high school principal, an anonymous survey of local teens, a review of agency X's service utilization data).

Who Should Be at the Table?

Two groups of people and organizations will be involved in your assessment although these groups will usually overlap. One group plans and executes the assessment (the research group), while another group of people and organizations serves as interview or survey subjects (the information group).

The research group may include only you or your agency, but collaborate with others if you can. Be sure to include teens on your research team if at all possible. Teens bring an invaluable perspective, and they will have great insight about the methods that are likely to reach their peers. Another important partner is the local university or a research institute, which should be able to help guide the whole process and perhaps even provide graduate students who will help gather and analyze the data.

The information group should include all organizations, agencies, and key individuals who come in contact with teens or crime victims in your community, such as the following:

- Hospitals and clinics
- Community mental health centers
- Victim service organizations (rape crisis centers, domestic violence shelters, etc.)
- Police departments

- Prosecutors' offices
- Legal services agencies
- Schools
- Parent organizations (PTAs)
- Youth programs
- Faith-based institutions
- Ethnic community-based organizations

Finding Existing Information

Assessment seems less of a chore once you realize that a lot of information may be out there already and that you don't need to reinvent the wheel. Finding out what information already exists also lets you know what data are *not* being collected.

The following types of information should be relatively easy to gather:

Literature review: This is simple library and/or Internet research. Check national, state, and local periodicals (including journals, magazines, and newspapers) for any articles on your topic (e.g., teen dating violence). In addition to providing background on the issue, these articles can be a good source of statistics. Librarians are generally eager to help with this type of research and may even do a search for you if you call them and explain the purpose of your research.

Crime statistics: Local police jurisdictions should be able to give you numbers on crimes reported to them, and the FBI collects and publishes national reported crime statistics. Although teens report only 37.8 percent of the crimes against them, the numbers can still be a good starting point. For local numbers, call your police department. For FBI numbers, visit www.fbi.gov/publications.htm.

Victimization data: Every year the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) of the U.S. Department of Justice administers the National Crime Victimization

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Survey by phoning a representative sample of households around the country. Data are available on the BJS website (www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs) and are updated annually. The survey includes both reported and unreported crime, but because it does not break the data down by geographic areas, only the national picture of victimization emerges. Still, this data can be useful as a starting point or for comparison with local data.

Service utilization data: Many victim service agencies compile demographic information on the clients they serve. A summary of these data (without identifiers, of course) can help you determine which parts of the local population are most likely to seek or receive help. Keep in mind that the people getting the most service are not necessarily the people suffering the most victimization. You will probably find that certain groups in your community (such as teens) are underrepresented.

Local government data: Many municipal and county governments keep data on various aspects of the population and community life, which can be useful for background or comparison purposes. By combining local government information with service utilization data, you may find, for example, that teens make up 15 percent of your local population but only 5 percent of the client base at the local victim service agency.

Adding Fresh Information

Once you've gotten a general picture from the existing information, you can add new information with any of the methods described below. You probably don't need to use every method. Select the methods that are most likely to help you answer your research questions and accomplish your goals.

Surveys: You can accomplish many purposes with surveys. An anonymous survey of local teens can

produce otherwise unavailable information on the types and frequency of teen victimization in your community, help-seeking behaviors, and teen perceptions of local resources. A survey of local agencies may tell you whether or not service providers understand what teens need. A victim satisfaction survey of clients lets you know whether the teens who get services find them helpful. Seek expert advice from university-based or professional researchers on the development, administration, and analysis of your survey. You may be able to get such assistance *pro bono*.

Interviews: You can use interviews to get background information from key community people, solicit in-depth perceptions from teen victims, and learn what obstacles service providers face in implementing teen-specific services. Although it's impossible to conduct an anonymous interview, when you interview victims, you should keep their identity confidential.

Focus groups: Gathering a group of similar individuals (e.g., teens, service providers, or parents) to share their ideas on a particular topic can be a valuable research tool. One person facilitates the discussion, and another takes notes or records the session (with the participants' consent). Again, confidentiality is important. More tips for facilitating focus groups can be found on the Internet by doing a keyword search for "conducting focus groups."

Roundtable discussions: Like focus groups, roundtable discussions can provide valuable information, but the group includes participants from a variety of fields or backgrounds. For example, a roundtable may convene the chief of police, the director of an adolescent clinic, a local youth worker, the high school principal, the director of the domestic violence shelter, and two teens. A roundtable discussion can yield different per-

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spectives on the issue and, at the same time, lay the foundation for a community-wide collaboration for teen victims.

Public forums: These meetings open the conversation to anyone in the community with an interest in the issue. Public forums often begin with a presentation or panel discussion followed by a question-and-answer period. Teens can contribute a great deal of energy and enthusiasm to planning and running such an event. They can often provide good insights on how to get community members (including their parents, teachers, friends, and neighbors) to attend.

Inventory of resources: People—especially teenagers—may be unaware of some of the community resources for teen victims. Begin with the phone book and use “snowball referrals” (one organization refers you to another) to gather information on all the resources available in your community, from youth recreation programs to teen health clinics, from mental health counseling to crisis intervention. Compiling this information highlights gaps and duplications in available services. It also becomes a wonderful tool for future outreach efforts.

Mapping: To put the final touches on your assessment, create a map showing the locations of the resources and problem spots in the community, along with any other pertinent information. This visual representation of your assessment results will come in handy when you are dealing with busy public officials or agency executives.

A Word About Good Practice

Some community assessment activities may qualify as “research on human subjects.” According to the federal government, a human research subject is “a living individual about whom an investigator conducting research obtains

(1) data through intervention or interaction with the individual, or (2) identifiable private information.”¹

Generally any research involving human subjects that is conducted under the auspices of a university or with federal grant money must be cleared by an Institutional Review Board, or IRB, which is an official body, often based in a university, whose purpose is to ensure that the research design complies with federal guidelines *before* it is carried out.

If there is no more than minimal risk to those who participate in the assessment, you may not need IRB approval. If you are not sure whether you need IRB review, consult a researcher at your local university or your grant monitor.

Even if you don’t go before an IRB, there are certain considerations you should address when conducting research with human subjects as a matter of ethics and good practice.

Privacy: Any time someone is asked to provide personal information, it may be deemed an invasion of privacy. This does not mean personal questions should never be asked, but proper care must be taken to safeguard private information and to fully inform those providing it (the research subjects) of their rights and how the information will be handled.

Anonymity: The easiest and best way to protect a subject’s privacy is to keep the information completely anonymous and prevent it from being linked to the identity of the person who provided it. Thus, when you conduct a survey, you can tell participants not to put their names on the survey forms and arrange for them to return the forms in a way that protects participants’ identities. For example, if teens fill out anonymous questionnaires, you can have them put the completed surveys in a box rather than handing them to a teacher or to the researcher. If you are conducting

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a focus group, you can ask participants to use only their first names or pseudonyms.

Confidentiality: Confidentiality means that the researcher knows the identity of the person who provides the information but takes steps to ensure that it is not revealed to anyone else, except if required by law. The identity of focus group participants and interview subjects should generally be kept confidential, unless no sensitive information is discussed and the participants agree or want their identities to be known. If researchers keep written or electronic records with the names of the participants, they should make sure the information is stored securely. To stress the importance of confidentiality, researchers and those working with them often sign confidentiality pledges.

Informed consent: People participating in research as subjects (meaning they will provide information about themselves) should only do so after giving informed consent. "Informed" means that the researcher explains any risks and benefits of participating in the research, the goals of the research and how the information will be used, the limits of confidentiality, and the fact that the subjects' participation is voluntary and they may stop at any time (or leave any question blank) without any penalty or negative consequence.

Once they have been given all of this information, people can make informed decisions about whether or not to participate. Those who agree will usually be asked to sign a document that summarizes the information they have already been given and states that they are participating voluntarily. In the case of anonymous surveys, the above information is generally summarized in an introduction to the questionnaire.

Informed consent for minors: Minor children who are the subject of research are regarded as more

vulnerable than adults. Informed consent for a minor to participate in a research study has to be given by a parent or guardian. It is good practice to obtain the minor's agreement to participate as well (either verbally or in writing, depending on the age and level of understanding of the child). The only circumstance in which parental consent *might* be waived is if the minor is being asked to do a task in the course of an activity he or she is already involved in (for example, in school or in an afterschool program) and the task presents no more risk than would normally be incurred in that setting. For more information on research involving children, see the American Psychological Association's "Division 7 Task Force Report on IRB Issues," which can be found at <http://classweb.gmu.edu/awinsler/div7/files/IRBissues.doc>.

Mandated reporting: State laws vary on whether or not researchers are mandated reporters of suspected child abuse or neglect. Check your state's law. If you are required to report information about suspected abuse learned through research, you might also need to explain this fact in the informed consent document. Contact a local university or your grant monitor for help sorting through this issue.

Psychological distress: Whenever someone is asked to share personal information, especially about victimization, there is a risk the person may become emotionally distressed. It is good practice, in addition to obtaining informed consent, to provide research subjects with resources, such as informational pamphlets and names and addresses of people or organizations to call, in case the questions you ask cause distress. If you think the questions being asked are highly sensitive, you may want to arrange for a qualified person to be available to offer immediate counseling and support.

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Putting It All Together

Once you've collected your data, you'll have to analyze it. Your analysis will answer your original research questions and determine whether you've met your research goals. Below are a few questions you can use to guide your analysis:

- Where are the overlaps in services?
- Where are the gaps?
- Are there particular populations not being served?
- Are there resources in the community that are being underutilized?
- Is there a particular crime against teens that is not being addressed?
- What are the strengths of this community that can contribute to the action plan moving forward?

What Can You Do With All This Information?

However complex or simple your assessment, it will yield valuable information for your agency and your community. You can use the information first and foremost to improve (or begin) services for teen victims. But you don't stop there. You can also do the following:

- Write a news release that announces your findings.
- Write a letter to the editor of the local newspaper or contribute an op-ed. (Don't overlook small local papers or even school newspapers.)

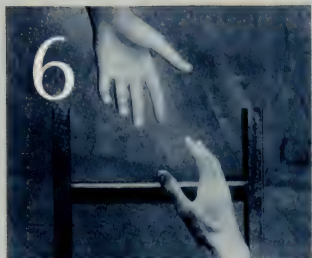
- Hold a news conference.
- Hold a panel discussion.
- Hold a community meeting to disseminate your results.
- Design targeted outreach.
- Make recommendations (large and small) to policymakers.
- Lead by example and begin making changes.

Publicizing the results of your assessment to the broader community can generate interest and support for new services or programs that address teen victimization. You may find individuals who are willing to volunteer their time or make donations to enhance services for teen victims. You may also be able to put pressure on public officials who can influence government priorities and budgets.

You are reading this handbook because you care about making the world safer and better for teenage victims of crime. The best way to do this is to begin by getting a handle on the problems (and strengths) of your own community. Current and accurate information is instrumental in creating outreach, services, and policies that match local needs. You don't have to have a Ph.D. to conduct a community assessment. Just do it!

NOTE

1. Office for Protection from Research Risks, "Summary of Basic Protections for Human Subjects," December 23, 1997, National Institutes of Health, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, accessed online at www.hhs.gov/ohrp/humansubjects/guidance/basics.htm#Definitions (8/22/05).



Can't Teach 'Em Till You Reach 'Em

Many service providers conduct teen education and outreach activities that focus on the prevention of abusive behavior and victimization. Prevention education is certainly critical. Many prevention programs, however, miss the boat by failing to include information for teens who have already been victimized. Because young people ages 12 to 19 have the highest rates of criminal victimization among all people ages 12 and over, outreach coordinators and prevention educators should be aware that they will always have some victims in their audience.

STRATEGIES FOR EDUCATION AND OUTREACH

Are you prepared to deal with disclosures and provide appropriate referrals to teen victims? More important, do you present clear information about what constitutes criminal behavior or victimization, how victims may feel, and places where they can get help? Such information can help teens self-identify as victims, and it can alert those teens who are not yet ready to disclose their victimization to the resources they may later choose to use. The most important function of violence and victimization education for teen victims is to let them know that they are not alone and that help is available.

Your outreach may target teen victims to raise awareness of the effects of victimization, to encourage help-seeking behavior, or to increase knowledge in the community of a specific program or service. Whatever the purpose, you can use several strategies to increase your chances of success.

Youth-led outreach: Involving teens in designing and delivering outreach programs is sure to increase their effectiveness. Teens are the experts on their peers, and they can tell you what approaches, messages, designs, colors, and language are most likely to appeal to other teens. Many teens are also enthusiastic presenters, and youth-led skits and educational presentations often have a far greater impact than information provided by adults.

Strategic placement: Outreach materials should be made available in the places where teens gather (schools, recreational programs, restaurants, movie theaters, malls, amusement parks, community pools). Adolescents place a premium on privacy. Some outreach materials should be in places where a teen can take a flier or jot down a telephone number without being seen (e.g., restrooms, fitting rooms). The Internet is another essential place to post information for teens because teens spend large amounts of time online, and it is a medium that affords a good deal of privacy.

Teen-friendly language: It is important to create materials that are understandable and meaningful to teens. For example, while professionals may describe interpersonal violence in romantic rela-

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tionships as “dating violence,” some teens may find the word “dating” antiquated and think it does not apply to them. When in doubt, ask a teen (or, better yet, ask a group of teens) to check your language and suggest alternative words and phrases that are more likely to be understood and embraced by a broad range of youth.

Diverse images: If you are including images of people in your materials, be sure that they reflect the diversity of the community you are trying to reach. Adults sometimes think of teens as a monolithic group, but it is important to remember that “teen culture” is not universal and that teens are as diverse in dress, style, and culture (not to mention skin tones, features, and body types) as any group of adults. Also remember to include images of persons with disabilities.

In-person outreach: Youth who are already repeat or chronic victims of violence and abuse most need service but are least likely to trust service providers or any other adults. Many have run away from their homes (or have been kicked out) and live in environments where they are subject to continuous victimization. School-based outreach or even community-wide information campaigns are unlikely to reach such youth. Outreach workers must find these teens where they are (generally on the street) and talk with them many times before the youth trust enough to seek or accept help.

Runaway and homeless youth are not the only teens in this category: foster youth, teens from neighborhoods with high levels of violence, and youth growing up in communities with “codes of silence” about crime and victimization can also be hard to reach. For all of these teens, you will have to build trust before you can expect them to disclose victimization or seek or accept any help.

Reaching Special Populations

Here are some things to keep in mind if you want to reach certain populations.

Rural youth: When you are working with youth in rural communities, privacy and confidentiality become more difficult because “everyone knows everyone” in these small communities. On the other hand, these strong interpersonal networks are also an asset that can be tapped to the advantage of victimized youth. Messages might be most effectively spread through word of mouth in rural communities. Take advantage, too, of natural community gatherings, such as county fairs, to reach out to youth.

Immigrant youth: Outreach to youth from immigrant families, whether or not they speak English, requires collaborating with ethnic community leaders and organizations. These leaders can help you understand cultural norms that affect the youth’s (and the family’s) perceptions of victimization, service providers, and other relevant issues. When creating outreach materials in a language other than English, be sure to have a native speaker (ideally, several native speakers) of that language read them for accuracy and clarity. Most important, be open to doing things differently, and keep the whole family in mind—not just the teen you are trying to reach.

Tribal youth: Outreach to youth in tribal communities combines many of the factors listed above, whether the youth are in reservation, rural, or urban Native communities. It is important to learn about and respect the culture of the youth, their family, and their “extended family” in the tribal community, which usually consists of blood relations and relations by marriage or tribal affiliation in reservation and rural areas, but may take on an entirely different appearance

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as “community” in an urban setting. It is equally important to try to understand the added weight strong cultural traditions can bring to normal intergenerational tensions. Moreover, one must attempt to understand how, in contrast, those same cultural traditions can be utilized to reinforce cultural value systems and a sense of community and family among American Indian and Alaska Native teens. In tribal communities, whenever possible call upon respected elders to deliver messages to youth. Then involve teens directly in project goals and objectives as valued members of the community-at-large. In reservation and rural areas, consider methods for conducting outreach to tribal youth through tribal casinos, health clinics, recreational resorts and retreats, and powwow and ceremonial events. In urban areas, consider methods for conducting outreach through urban Indian health clinics, powwow and ceremonial cultural events, and through urban Native organizations that are utilized as “meeting places” by Indian people.

Gay and questioning youth: Gay youth, as well as those who are perceived to be gay, are at high risk for victimization, especially as the targets of bullying and harassment in school. It is imperative to reach these youth with appropriate messages about their right to safety and acceptance and the availability of help. Gay youth who are victimized face the same obstacles to seeking help as other teen victims, plus some additional ones. These include the fear of “outing” themselves if they report their victimization and the possibility that the person designated to receive reports of victimization (an assistant principal or a police officer, for instance) will be homophobic and therefore less responsive or nonresponsive to the teen.

When reaching out to youth who are or may be gay, remember that they may fall into one of

three groups: those who are “out,” those who are certain of their orientation but are not “out,” and those who are questioning. Questioning youth—especially those who live or attend school in an environment that is hostile toward gays—are not likely to respond to messages aimed explicitly at gay youth (while the others might). The challenge to those designing and conducting outreach for this population is to convey a clear message of welcome and acceptance that is believable to gay youth (many of whom do not feel welcome or accepted in most places) but that does not make them feel singled out or exposed. The best strategy is to consult with young people who identify as homosexual and ask what would appeal to them or would have appealed to them when they were teenagers.

Ideas for Specific Activities

If you don’t have much experience with doing outreach to teen victims, here are a few activities to try:

- Create teen-friendly posters and get local businesses and schools to put them up.
- Hold a poster contest in the schools.
- Get the word out through school newspapers.
- Plan a school assembly to reach large numbers of teens.
- Record a radio or television public service announcement. Recruit teen actors through local youth programs or schools.
- Get a company to donate billboard or other public space to raise awareness of victimization among teens or to publicize your agency.
- Create or partner with a youth drama company to do interactive theater presentations on victimization.

It's important to think about physical and practical barriers that may keep teens away from your program.



- ▮ Hold a youth open-mike night where teens can act out skits, read poetry, or sing about issues affecting their lives.

All of the above strategies address informational, psychological, and emotional barriers that prevent teen victims from getting help. It's also important to think about physical and practical barriers that may keep teens away from your program, group, or agency. Do you offer flexible

hours to accommodate teens' schedules? Will they be able to get to your office? You might consider providing some kind of transportation if your location is not easily accessible, or you might need to offer the services in a school or other location where teens are already spending time.

All of these ideas may help get teens through your door. Once they are there, will your organization pass the "teen-friendly" test?



The Writing on the Wall

Step into the shoes of a teenage victim of crime for a moment. Walk through the doors of your agency—and ask yourself which of the following scenarios your teen visitor would experience.

THINKING ABOUT SERVICE ENVIRONMENTS

Scenario 1

Geez, this place was hard to find. I don't know why I'm here anyway—the name says it's for children. Look at those pictures on the wall—clowns and balloons. What do they think I am, a baby? OK, I'm checked in, just gotta' wait now. What do they have to read? Hmm—*Parents* magazine, *Parenting*, *Better Homes and Gardens*. Boring! These are for the moms dragging their crazy little kids in here. I hope the lady I'm going to see doesn't treat me like a baby. I don't think this place is for me.

Scenario 2

This place feels like my mom's office. No windows, no color, nobody smiling. Everyone seems like they're in a hurry to get somewhere. How am I supposed to fill out all these forms? I don't know the answers to half these questions. Maybe the receptionist can help me . . . oh, she looks busy. Well, maybe this notice on the wall explains. No, it's just some legal mumbo-jumbo. It's cold in here. If there were more chairs, I'd change seats so the air wasn't blowing right on me. If I don't get called in the next five minutes, I'm leaving.

Scenario 3

Hmm, this place seems OK. I feel a little weird being here, but the receptionist is treating me nice. Nobody is acting like I'm crazy. I have to wait a few minutes, maybe I'll pick up one of these magazines. Oh, this is one of my favorites. On second thought, I can't concentrate on a magazine right now. I'll just look around. Interesting poster over there . . . that kid kinda looks like my brother. "You deserve respect." Yeah, well, at least *somebody* thinks so. I hope nobody I know comes in. But I guess if they are here, they must be in the same boat I'm in, so they shouldn't talk. Yeah, this place seems safe enough. Oh, they're calling me—let's see if this guy can help me.

You get the idea. From the moment they walk in the door, teens need to receive a loud and clear message that this place is for

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them, that it is safe, and that they will be treated with respect. There are many ways—direct and indirect—to convey these messages or their opposites. Take some time to examine all the factors at your agency—from the decor to the expressions on the faces of the staff—that can influence teen victims' comfort level. After all it took to get them there, it would be a shame to lose them because of overlooked but easily correctable problems with your agency's environment. (Of course, not all environmental factors can be changed, but it's important to address those that can.)

In addition to thinking about the age and developmental stage of your clientele, consider the following:

- Would boys and girls be equally comfortable here, or do we project an image of being "for women only" or "for men only"?
- Would a gay teen feel comfortable here?
- How about kids of color?
- Kids with disabilities?
- Kids with single parents or no parents?
- If you serve second-generation young Americans who are fluent in English, do you consider the language barriers faced by their parents? How about cultural issues, apart from language, that can influence the helping relationship?

Interacting With Teens

No magic formula exists for building a strong rapport with a victimized teen, but there are a few key points to keep in mind. Successful rapport is built on the following elements:

Trust: Trusting an adult can be hard for any teen, but it is especially hard for teens who have been victimized because their trust has already been broken. When interacting with a teenage victim

of crime, don't expect trust to come easily or all at once. Be sure to keep promises and not to make promises you can't keep. From the beginning, be clear about confidentiality and its limits so that teens do not feel betrayed if mandatory reporting requirements affect your ability to keep a confidence. Rather than pressing for disclosures, let teens choose what they want to share with you and when.

Self-knowledge: Are staff members aware of their own boundaries, sensitivities, and biases, and do they take this information into account when reflecting on their work with teens? Does your organization provide opportunities for professional development and personal reflection on the work your staff is doing?

Preparation: Are staff members adequately prepared for sessions with teens? Do they have appropriate activities, snacks, and tools? Are they prepared with strategies for answering adolescents' tough questions? Does your organization provide adequate planning time, or are your staff members overscheduled? Weigh the pros and cons of reaching as many people as possible versus making quality connections that require more time. If your staff members often feel drained, chances are the quality of their work (and possibly their health) is suffering.

Flexibility: Do staff members know how to think on their feet? Planning is critical, but adolescents have a way of catching adults off guard and upending the best-laid plans. Whether staff members are facilitating educational presentations, support groups, or individual sessions, they must keep a balance between sticking to the task at hand and responding to unanticipated needs or questions that arise. They must also deal with scheduling problems and accommodate teens' other commitments.

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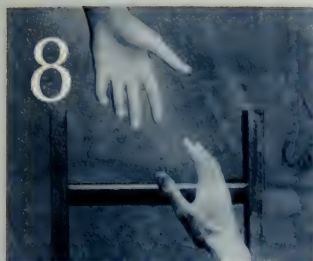


Sense of humor: Are your staff members willing to laugh and play, or are they all business? Humor and playfulness are vital keys to connecting with youth. But make sure they don't overdo it. Nobody is served well by adults who try too hard to be comedians or buddies to the youth with whom they work.

Listening skills: Even when we are generally good at listening, we sometimes can't resist the temptation to interrupt teens to give advice or ask questions. Like all other victims, teens need the chance to tell their story without being inter-

rupted. In fact, the additional obstacles teens have to overcome before opening up make it even more important that they be fully heard. Also, teens may test the waters of disclosure by hinting at victimization indirectly. Adults who listen well can pick up on these cues and respond in a way that eases fears and invites trust.

The bottom line to working well with teens is knowing your "stuff," conveying respect and honesty, and accepting them for who they are. With these ingredients in place, connecting with teens can become second nature.



We've all been there, but many adults have developed selective amnesia about the experiences, feelings, and especially the frustrations of being an almost-adult. Take a few minutes to remember what it was like to be in middle school or high school. Do you remember what kind of music you listened to—and what your parents thought of it? What did you wear? Who was your first crush? Did you like the way you looked? Who did you tell your secrets to, and did that person keep your confidence?

OK, We've Got Adolescent Clients

How Do We Best Serve Them?

TEEN-SPECIFIC INTERVENTION STRATEGIES

This section presents ideas for collaborations, programs, and interventions tailored to teen victims. But empathy is the most important ingredient in any recipe for youth assistance.

Collaboration

A refrain in the youth development field is that "Young people grow up in communities, not programs." Collaboration between and among schools, families, and the community offers a greater chance of success than programs that are limited to one aspect of a young person's environment. The more systems involved in creating positive change for teens, the more likely the changes are to stick. Here are a few ideas for using collaboration to help teen victims:

Training and supporting school staff: Teachers, school administrators, and counselors interact with teenagers every day; they are often the first responders when a teen discloses victimization. Victim service providers understand the importance of that first response. It can help reduce trauma and empower the victim, or it can close the door to help and increase isolation, fear, and shame. Victim service providers can train school staff to identify teen victims; believe them when they come forward; respond with empathy and kindness; and offer assistance, information, and referrals to local resources. Contact local school principals in the spring, and request to be placed on the following year's in-service calendar. A written training proposal or a face-to-face meeting may help secure a commitment after the initial phone conversation.

School-based services: Offering school-based victim services eliminates several of the barriers teens face. Students are more likely to use victim services in a school if they can do so without drawing attention to themselves. Students who are reluctant to be seen approaching the "victim person" are more likely to use services that are camouflaged by placement within larger entities, such as a guidance office or health clinic. Transportation is not a problem when services are offered at the school. Basing crime victim resources and services within a school should be considered as a

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stepping-stone to academic achievement for students who might otherwise tune out, fail, or drop out of school altogether.

Some school administrators may fear that by seeking collaboration you are asking them to “do one more thing” with an already stretched budget and overextended staff. It is important to frame the collaboration in such a way that you are taking a burden off the school staff rather than adding to their already considerable load. Basing your services in a school may be as simple as the school lending you an empty office or conference room during certain hours (focusing on before and after school time, lunch hours, and electives so as not to take away from core instructional time). You may work with the school guidance counselor to develop a referral system or with parent liaisons to support their work with families in crisis.

In all cases, your work should complement and support what the school is already doing, and you should make it as easy as possible for school staff to refer students who may be in trouble. This removes the burden from teachers who may worry that something is “wrong” with a student but be unsure how to approach the issue. By combining the training mentioned above with school-based services, a community agency can be a great support to a school that is committed to having all its students thrive.

Ultimately, when teen victims get the support they need, they are more likely to be able to focus and achieve in school. By partnering with victim service providers, schools can help reduce the emotional burdens their students carry, thus creating more peaceful schools and more successful students.

Universal health screening: Many hospitals and clinics now universally screen adult female patients for domestic violence and make appropriate referrals to local shelters, support groups,

and advocacy programs. The same concept can be applied to adolescent health. In both school-based and community-based health centers, universal screening for violent victimization (no matter who the perpetrator is), coupled with appropriate referrals, could ensure that many more teen victims find the help they need.¹

Criminal justice advocacy: The criminal justice system is difficult even for adult crime victims to navigate. Teens face additional hurdles such as difficulty understanding legal terms, unrealistic expectations, need for parental consent, and a lack of legal standing. Collaborations between victim service providers and the courts can ease the burden of participating in a criminal case for teen victims.

Programs

Some victim service organizations have the desire and the resources to start programs for teen victims but don't know where to begin. Here are a few ideas:

Teen-to-teen hotlines: Most teens feel more comfortable talking with someone their own age than with an adult—on any topic but especially about victimization. Staffing a hotline with well-trained and well-supported teens, and publicizing it broadly, could make a big difference in your community. Even if the hotline operates only during limited hours (such as after school from 3:00 to 7:00 p.m.), teens who would not otherwise have come forward may take the opportunity to speak anonymously to someone their own age and receive needed help.²

Youth on board: Involving teens in organizational decision making can greatly increase the effectiveness of your organization's work with adolescents. You can add youth members to existing

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them acted out by others.*

boards of directors or create a youth advisory committee (YAC) as an adjunct to the board or executive team. As a rule, youth participation in adult bodies such as boards should involve at least two teens to avoid tokenism and to allow the teens to support each other in an unfamiliar situation. In a YAC, the teen members should be closely involved in establishing the rules and procedures the group will follow. In all cases, youth must receive training and information to prepare them for these roles and ongoing support for the development of their leadership skills.

Groups for adolescents: Whether their purpose is education, support, or therapy, groups can be a great setting for working with adolescents. The power of peers as helpers and healers can shine through in a group setting. Group leaders must ensure that the structure, rules, and activities are developmentally appropriate and that group members have input into these aspects of the group. The trick is providing the right balance of power and limits for teens in a group setting.

Interventions

At the individual or group level, what kinds of activities and interventions work well with teens? The following are some possibilities to get you started:

Journals: Some teens resist talking about their experiences but take readily to writing. You can use a journal as a communication tool between a teen and a supportive adult or for the teen's eyes only to record experiences to talk about at a later time. Either way, make sure the teen knows at the outset if you expect the journal writing to be shared.

Drama: Many teens respond well to acting out scenarios or seeing them acted out by others.

Introducing a video camera into a group of kids may bring out the "movie star" in some. Especially for teens who are not ready for personal disclosure, skits and improvisation can be a safe way to explore feelings and experiences.

Art and poetry: It can be extremely helpful to provide youth with creative outlets for expressing their histories, questions, doubts, and beliefs. You don't need to be a professional artist to teach or to use art-making techniques in a therapeutic or resiliency-building way. The value of such exercises is primarily in the process of creating, not the perceived quality of the outcome.

Metaphors: Sometimes adults struggle to explain complex concepts in a way teens will understand. Creating metaphors with familiar experiences, such as sports, movie plots, or celebrity relationships, can help. Metaphors relate information to teens' reality and give them a way to organize their thinking on an issue. For example, a group of youth leaders struggling to complete a task may relate to the metaphor of a basketball team in which each player has a role in scoring baskets. Not everyone can slam-dunk; some players are ball handlers, some are defensive superstars, and some are great at assists or rebounds. All are needed for the team to succeed.

Lists: Since abstract thinking is still a new skill for middle adolescents (and has not yet developed in early adolescents), make things as concrete as possible. Have a teen make one list of his or her personal strengths and another of people or resources in the community that can be counted on. Those pieces of paper can become a concrete reminder of the teen's safety net to be consulted when needed.

Lists of pros and cons can help teens think critically about decisions they may face. Service providers should avoid telling a teen victim—or

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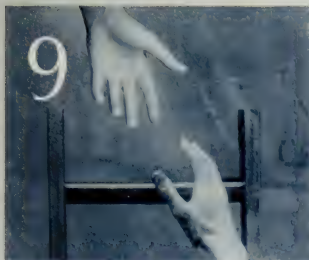
any victim for that matter—exactly what to do because this approach reinforces the victim's feelings of powerlessness. Instead, adults can help a teen picture—and write down—the possible consequences of different courses of action. The teen develops a tangible tool for making an informed choice, and the service provider has respected the teen's growing autonomy and possibly helped restore some of the personal power that was lost with the victimization.

The ideas in this chapter can help engage youth in whatever context you are working with them, whether educational, skill development, or therapeutic. They are not meant to be guidelines for treating teens with serious mental health problems resulting from victimization. If you are

working with teen victims and are not a mental health professional, be sure to connect with a licensed provider in your community with whom you can consult and to whom you can refer youth who show signs of depression, anxiety, posttraumatic stress, suicidal ideation, or substance abuse.

NOTES

1. For more information on this approach, see Angela Diaz, Sharon Edwards, Wendy P. Neal, Pamela Ludmer, Stephen B. Sondike, Carol Kessler, Daniel Medeiros, and Anne T. Nucci, "Obtaining a History of Sexual Victimization from Adolescent Females Seeking Routine Health Care," *Mount Sinai Journal of Medicine* 71, no. 3 (2004): 170–173.
2. For more information on setting up a teen hotline, contact the New York City Youthline at 212-788-5665 or visit www.nyc.gov/html/dycd/html/services-youthline.html.



The Sticky Stuff

This chapter gives brief guidance on some of these issues. However, it is not meant as a comprehensive legal or ethical guide. It is imperative that all professionals who work with minors familiarize themselves with their state laws and the ethical guidelines of their own profession.

FAMILIES AND LEGAL ISSUES

Working with adolescents, who are, by definition, in between childhood and adulthood, invariably involves certain dilemmas. The most common of these surround the issue of when to involve parents or authorities, especially if such an involvement is against an adolescent's wishes. Victim service providers struggle with how to comply with legal requirements without violating the trust of their adolescent clients. They also struggle to balance respect for adolescents' growing autonomy with respect for the importance of families and the special role that parents continue to play in their adolescent children's lives.

Mandatory Reporting

As a result of the federal Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA), all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and the U.S. territories have laws that designate specific professions and groups as mandatory reporters of known or suspected child maltreatment. Mandatory reporting requirements are also commonly included in American Indian tribal law. The legal definitions of mandatory reporter, abuse, and neglect, as well as the circumstances under which one must report (e.g., known abuse, suspected abuse, reasonable grounds to suspect, etc.), vary from state to state. Most states designate healthcare workers, school personnel, childcare providers, social workers, law enforcement officers, and mental health professionals as mandated reporters. Certain states specify additional categories, such as substance abuse or domestic violence counselors, and some states require all citizens to report. State laws can be searched at the National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect website, <http://nccanch.acf.hhs.gov/general/legal/statutes/search/>. Tribal law can be searched at www.tribalresourcecenter.org.

Teenagers under the age of 18 are children under the law. They are vulnerable to abuse and neglect, and mandatory reporting requirements apply. The dilemma that arises for many professionals who work with teens is the concern that reporting abuse against a teen's wishes will destroy the trust they are working to establish and will prevent that teen from ever trusting or opening up to another adult.

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It is imperative that all professionals working with minors know and follow their state's laws. It goes without saying that the intent of such laws is to ensure intervention in all known or suspected cases of abuse in order to stop the abuse, prevent the situation from worsening, and help the victim recover. In some cases, a loss of the teen's trust is simply inevitable and must be accepted for the sake of preventing repeated abuse and, in some cases, even death.

There are, however, steps that adults can take to minimize the loss of trust in situations that require reporting abuse to authorities. It is wise for all mandatory reporters to make clear to teens at the outset of their work together the circumstances under which they must report, the purpose of mandatory reporting laws, and the chain of events that typically follows a report to authorities. In this way, if a teen discloses abuse, he or she will not be taken by surprise when the trusted adult explains that it must be reported.

When mandatory reporting situations do arise, too often the adults involved simply make the report and let the chips fall where they may. For all crime victims, and especially for teens, information is a crucial tool for navigating the confusing waters of the criminal justice or child welfare system. Mandated reporters should explain to teens that they will make (or have made) a report of suspected abuse, the basis of the report, and what is likely to occur next. The reporter may even give the teen the option of being present when the report is made, which can encourage trust and relieve the teen from wondering exactly what was said. (Bear in mind, though, that reporters are required to state any details of the abuse that they are aware of, and the teen should be prepared for hearing this if he or she chooses to be present for the call.) Although a teen may not be happy about the reporting or about the possible consequences (such as placement in a foster home or the breaking up of the family),

knowing what to expect at least allows him or her to prepare emotionally for the potential fallout.

When giving information to teens, adults must resist the temptation to reassure them that everything will be all right or that the situation will get better. These are possibilities and, certainly, hoped-for outcomes, but the reporting adult generally has no way of guaranteeing such promises and could be setting the teen up for further loss of trust if, in fact, things get worse before they get better—or do not get better at all. Moreover, adults should limit information about future events to what is known (e.g., "Child Protective Services will conduct an investigation") and should clearly state the uncertain nature of what *might* happen, giving the range of possibilities if known (e.g., "If they find evidence of abuse, one of several things might happen . . .").

If you must make such a report, offer the teen your ongoing support, but do not be surprised if he or she declines. Mandatory reporting tends to be a thankless aspect of the difficult but rewarding choice to work with young people. In the end, professionals must remind themselves that the action they have taken has potentially prevented further harm and put the teen on a path to receive services and supports that will ultimately further his or her growth and development. Meanwhile, if professionals have doubts about the quality of the child welfare system's response, they should consider it an ethical duty to advocate for the improvements they believe will help the system serve abused and neglected children better.

Parental Consent

Laws regarding parental consent to work with or treat adolescents are even more varied and complex than mandatory reporting laws. Most states' laws address whether or not (or under what circumstances) teens need parental consent for

Although adolescents are becoming independent, parents still have an essential role to play.

medical or mental health treatment, birth control, and abortion. As with mandatory reporting, it is incumbent upon those providing counseling, healthcare, or other services to teens to know and follow their state's law. Where "gray areas" exist, the service providers must use their best judgment and the ethical guidelines of their profession to determine their course of action.

Parental Involvement

Perhaps the biggest gray area is when and to what extent to involve parents, legal guardians, and other family members in your work with youth, whether or not consent is required. The answer will vary by circumstances, but some general principles can be applied:

- Although adolescents are becoming independent, parents still have an essential role to play in their children's safe and healthy passage through adolescence to adulthood.
- When parents do not represent an active danger to their children (as in known or suspected cases of abuse), they should be included in your work in some way. This inclusion can range from a single phone call, face-to-face meeting, or home visit to a family potluck dinner for all the teens you work with. You might even provide intensive family therapy if your professional training and context make that appropriate.
- Elicit teens' input on the best way to involve their families, and get their reactions to your ideas. They are likely to have practical information that will help your outreach or intervention be successful (such as their parents' likelihood to attend an evening event, potential scheduling conflicts, problems with transportation or childcare, etc.).
- When a teen is reluctant to have you contact parents but no danger of abuse is present,

consider ways of encouraging the teen to talk with his or her parents about your work together, and work your way up to a direct contact between yourself and the parent or guardian that is facilitated by the teen. Respect the sensitivity of the issues being discussed and the teen's need for privacy, but balance that with the known benefits of parental involvement with their teens. In general, an introductory call or visit with parents will not harm your relationship with the teen if done in a way that is sensitive to the teen's concerns.

- When parents are "over-involved" and not able to recognize or accept their teen's need for some autonomy, it may be the role of the professional to gently educate parents about adolescent development and the normative behavior of teens. This is generally best done by a qualified mental health professional or adolescent development expert. If you do not have such expertise, it is best to consult with your supervisor or another professional in your community who can give you guidance in such situations.
- Many teen victims would like to tell their parents what happened to them (if the parent is not the offender) but are afraid to do so for various reasons, including fear of being blamed or not being believed or the desire not to worry or disappoint their parents, especially if the parents are already under stress. In such cases, service providers can be a great help to a teen by supporting him or her in talking to the parents or guardians about what happened. Arrange a joint meeting with the teen and the parents, either in your office or in the home. Ask the parents to listen and not to interrupt while the teen tells his or her story, and then offer support to both the teen and the parents and answer their questions about adolescent

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development, typical reactions to crime, and legal options.

When they are not abusive (and only a small minority of parents or caregivers are), parents are the best resource to help their adolescent children cope with and recover from the trauma of victimization. Most parents need only information and respectful professional guidance in order to appropriately support their teen. This procedure can be used with anyone to whom the teen wants to talk about his or her victimization, including siblings, other relatives, and friends. In situations where parents are not able to be supportive, seeking support from these other sources will be critical for the teen.

- In cases where it is suspected or known that parents will react abusively to a disclosure of victimization, then it is clearly not wise to put the teen in a vulnerable position by

involving parents unnecessarily. If legal requirements indicate that you must inform parents of a teen's victimization, then along with discharging your legal duty to the parents, you should report the suspected abuse to Child Protective Services and discuss safety planning with the teen. For more information on safety planning, call the National Center for Victims of Crime's Helpline at 800-FYI-CALL.

All of the issues addressed in this chapter are complex and worthy of detailed treatment that is beyond the scope of this publication. The intent of this chapter is to provide introductory guidance and to encourage victim service providers to become intimately acquainted with their state laws, professional ethics bodies, and local resources. We hope to address these issues in more detail in future publications.



Wrapping It Up

A FEW FINAL WORDS

The ideas presented in this handbook represent only a sample of possible approaches, a quick start-up guide for working with teens. Many books and Internet resources are available for those who want to do more research (see list on pages 34–37). Additionally, practical experience will yield insights that lead to new ideas for engaging young people in your community.

This handbook offers starting points for victim service providers to engage and help teen victims in their communities. The next step is to build partnerships with the youth development organizations and schools in your community. As the chart in Chapter 2 illustrates (see page 5), the fit is a natural one, and teens can only benefit when those who care about their welfare learn to collaborate with one another. Teen victims will have reason to thank you.



Resources

National Crime Prevention Council

1000 Connecticut Avenue, NW
Thirteenth Floor
Washington, DC 20036-5325
202-466-6272
202-296-1356 fax
www.ncpc.org

The National Crime Prevention Council (NCPC) provides a variety of resources for youth, parents, educators, and law enforcement officers on staying safe and preventing crime. Materials include reproducible brochures for teens on such topics as dating violence and rape, drug and alcohol abuse, Internet safety, crime prevention in the workplace, gangs, vandalism, and more. NCPC provides information for adults on such issues as effective and appropriate strategies for working with youth during different developmental stages, working with adjudicated youth, youth service opportunities, racism and hate crimes, gangs, safer schools, and drugs. NCPC has also addressed the problem of bullying through a variety of outlets over the years. It has developed two public service advertising campaigns featuring McGruff that offer ways children can manage bullying, and it offers resource materials and training on teaching children and youth about bullying. In addition, NCPC's website www.mcgruff.org features games, tips, and stories about bullying. NCPC is a partner of the "Take a Stand! Lend a Hand! Stop Bullying Now" campaign of the Health Resources and Services Administration of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

National Center for Victims of Crime

2000 M Street, NW
Suite 480
Washington, DC 20036
202-467-8700
202-467-8701 fax
Helpline: 800-FYI-CALL
www.ncvc.org

The National Center for Victims of Crime (National Center) operates a toll-free confidential helpline offering information and referrals to victims and service providers anywhere in the United

States. The National Center also offers information on a variety of crime and victimization issues through its *Get Help* series bulletins, which can be found on the website. The bulletins address issues including assault, child sexual abuse, drug-related crimes, gay/lesbian violence, hate crimes, male rape, robbery, sexual assault, sexual harassment, stalking, teen dating violence, and victim services in schools. The National Center also provides information for teens and parents on helping and supporting victims of crime and resources that can assist victims. Through its public policy department, it also provides information on crime laws in each state.

**U.S. Department of Justice
Office for Victims of Crime**

810 Seventh Street, NW
Washington, DC 20531
202-307-5983
202-514-6383 fax
www.ovc.gov

The Office for Victims of Crime (OVC) provides a variety of information for those serving victims of crime. Publications include fact sheets, newsletters, guidebooks, activity books, and videos. OVC also provides an extensive resource list of organizations that provide information on different types of crime, including drunk driving, hate crimes, physical assault, sexual assault and rape, and random acts of violence. Additional information addresses crime victims' rights, victims with disabilities, and the American Indian population. OVC offers training for victim service providers and other professionals.

**Office for Victims of Crime Training and
Technical Assistance Center**

10530 Rosehaven Street, Suite 400
Fairfax, VA 22030
866-682-8822
703-279-4673 fax
www.ovc.gov/assist/welcome.html

The Office for Victims of Crime Training and Technical Assistance Center (OVC TTAC) is the nexus of a learning community focused on strengthening the capacity of victim assistance organizations across the country. OVC TTAC employs a variety of measurement tools, including surveys, stakeholder discussions, and literature reviews, to assess the needs of key constituencies and identify available TA and training resources to support their needs. It helps organizations foster professional development of their staff and enhance services to their communities.

**Office for Victims of Crime Resource Center
National Criminal Justice Reference Service**

PO Box 6000
Rockville, MD 20849-6000
800-851-3420
301-519-5212 fax
TTY: 877-712-9279
www.ovc.gov/ovcrcs/welcome.html

The Office for Victims of Crime Resource Center (OVCRC) produces, collects, maintains, and disseminates comprehensive information and resources for victim service providers and allied professionals. OVCRC provides up-to-date research and statistics, victim-related publications, and other information resources and referrals. It offers a directory of crime victim services, an NCJRS abstract database, and a biweekly electronic newsletter, JUSTINFO.

Adolescent Development

American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry. *Your Adolescent: Emotional, Behavioral, and Cognitive Development from Early Adolescence Through the Teen Years*. New York: Harper Collins, 1999.

American Psychological Association (APA). *Developing Adolescents: A Reference for Professionals*. Washington, DC: APA, 2002. Online at www.apa.org/pi/pii/develop.pdf.

Institute for Policy Research, Northwestern University. *Child, Adolescent and Family Studies*. Online at www.northwestern.edu/ipr/research/adolescent.html.

MedlinePlus, U.S. National Library of Medicine and National Institutes of Health. "Adolescent Development," *Medical Encyclopedia*. Online at www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/ency/article/002003.htm.

Ponton, Lynn E. *The Romance of Risk: Why Teenagers Do the Things They Do*. New York: Basic Books, 1997.

Wolf, Anthony E. *Get Out of My Life, But First Could You Drive Me and Cheryl to the Mall? A Parent's Guide to the New Teenager, Revised and Updated*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2002.

Impact of Victimization

Monahan, Cynthia. *Children and Trauma: A Guide for Parents and Professionals, Revised Edition*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1997.

Wordes, Madeline, and Michell Nunez. *Our Vulnerable Teenagers: Their Victimization, Its Consequences, and Directions for Prevention and Intervention*. Washington, DC: National Council on Crime and Delinquency and National Center for Victims of Crime, 2002.

Outreach

LAMBDA Youth OUTreach
www.lambda.org/youth.htm

Provides services for lesbian, gay, transgender, and bisexual youth

Massachusetts Department of Social Services
www.mass.gov/portal/
Adolescent Outreach Program: Skill-building for teens in out-of-home placement; Teen Peer Line: Youth-staffed phone line to answer teens' questions

Ohio State University Fact Sheet
"Involving Teens as Leaders" by Kathryn J. Cox and Ken Culp
<http://ohioline.osu.edu/4h-fact/0021.html>

Community Assessment

Council of Michigan Foundations, Michigan Community Foundation Youth Project
"The Needs Assessment Process"
Guidelines and Resources for Establishing a Youth Advisory Committee
www.youthgrantmakers.org/Documents/Chapter4.pdf

Iowa State University Extension, Extension to Communities
"Needs Assessment Strategies for Community Groups and Organizations"
www.extension.iastate.edu/communities/tools/assess/

Office for Victims of Crime
"Denver Victim Services 2000 Needs Assessment (VS2000)"
www.ovc.gov/publications/bulletins/dv_10_2000_1/welcome.html

Working With Teens

Connect for Kids

www.connectforkids.org

Articles and resources about young people and family issues

Innovation Center for Community and Youth Development

www.theinnovationcenter.org

Materials and resources for building youth-adult partnerships

John W. Gardner Center for Youth and Their Communities

Stanford University

<http://gardnercenter.stanford.edu/>

Resources for developing youth leadership and engaging youth in the community

National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect Information

Administration for Children and Families, U.S.

Department of Health and Human Services

<http://nccanch.acf.hhs.gov/>

Ohio 4-H

"What Makes Teens Special: Implications for Leadership Development"

www.ohio4h.org/youth/teen_leadership/tl16.html

Teens, Crime, and the Community

www.nationaltcc.org

Initiative for educating youth on safety and engaging them in the community

Urban Institute

"At Risk Teens: Reports"

www.urban.org/content/IssuesInFocus/AtRisk/Teens/Reports/Reports.htm

Research on youth violence and safety issues

Youth Leadership Institute

www.yli.org

Resources for youth and adults partnering to serve their communities



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www.ncpc.org

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